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The Taylor Appointment

President Kennedy has called General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Army Chief of Staff, out of retirement to be his personal adviser on "intelligence and military developments." The General's first assignment is to study the Berlin situation. He commanded the Allied occupation forces in West Berlin in 1949-51.

No one questions the military experience and proven combat capabilities of General Taylor.

Certainly there should be no question that President Kennedy needs capable advisers on international problems which can involve war; and that either he has had extremely poor advice in such fields or has not followed good advice when given him.

This was demonstrated clearly in the Cuban invasion when the bulk of the President's advisers apparently were civilians not qualified for judgment in that matter at hand—three former college professors stationed in the White House; the Secretary and Undersecretary of State plus a special but untitled "adviser" to the President on Latin American affairs; a Senator or two, and the President's brother, Bobby.

Reportedly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were "told" about the invasion plans rather than "consulted" on them and reportedly the President himself—at the last minute—cancelled the one provision which any capable junior grade military commander would insist on in such an invasion—adequate air cover. The Joint Chiefs, through a spokesman, have made it clear the lack of air cover was not their idea.

But the creation of this new post occupied by General Taylor may produce some squeamish situations. It is not comparable to the appointment of Admiral William D. Leahy as Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces during War II, as special Chief of Staff to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman.

The nation was at war then. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not exist in their present form. Obviously it was advisable for a man such as Mr. Roosevelt or Mr. Truman to have a top military authority at hand at all times—a man who could properly interpret and evaluate combat plans not only of the various U.S. branches of service but of those of other Allied nations.

General Taylor supposedly is to have access to all information within the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency and the National Security Council, but to have no command authority over anyone.

That sounds very easy. But it is impossible for a special Chief of Staff to the President to move in any way within the confines of the Joint Chiefs or other security agencies without the feeling within these agencies that he is the voice of the President and speaks with the President's power as Commander-in-Chief.

The inevitable result may be a lessening of morale within the Joint Chiefs and of their prestige in the eyes not only of the Armed Services of this country but of the military authorities of other countries. Yet, the Joint Chiefs organization was established by Congress to be the final, complete and sole adviser to the President on military matters. It was established to be, in part, exactly what General Taylor will have to be if he is going to fulfill the duties seemingly involved in his post.

It may be that General Taylor and the Chiefs will find a way to carry on without any dangerous surrender of autonomy on the part of the Joint Chiefs or creation of reluctance on their part to move as they think best, even though this may be against the known philosophies of the President's Chief of Staff, Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, has welcomed General Taylor and creation of the new post. He believes that the President's step can be valuable in levelling off the worldwide activities of his organization and co-ordinating it with other security agencies.

Prior to appointment of General Taylor, the President named two new Chiefs of Staff—General Curtis LeMay as Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Vice Admiral George W. Anderson Jr., as Chief of Naval Operations. Admiral Anderson is just as much of an air power enthusiast as General LeMay. On the other hand, while General Taylor certainly would not advocate any weakening of air strength, he believes that the first and foremost necessity in national security is a tremendously increased capacity for limited war—wars of the Korean type. For this he has recommended three billion dollars more spending than present budgets which already contain greatly expanded limited war appropriations.

General LeMay believes that as weapons systems improve the existing services will overlap more and more and thus automatically lead toward "a single service with a single chief of staff and one staff to operate (all) the Armed Services." (The quotation is from his testimony before a Senate subcommittee two years ago.)

General Taylor has proposed that the Joint Chiefs of Staff be dissolved and replaced by a single Defense Chief of Staff, plus a new advisory board which might be called the Supreme Military Council. The service Chiefs of Staff, under his plan, would act exclusively within their services and solely under their Department Secretaries and not as part of the present overall Joint Chiefs of Staff. Admiral Anderson strongly opposes a single military service, but believes in a unified command in overseas activities.

Whether these new military appointments by President Kennedy will lessen the confusion he himself already has created certainly is problematical. Let's hope so.